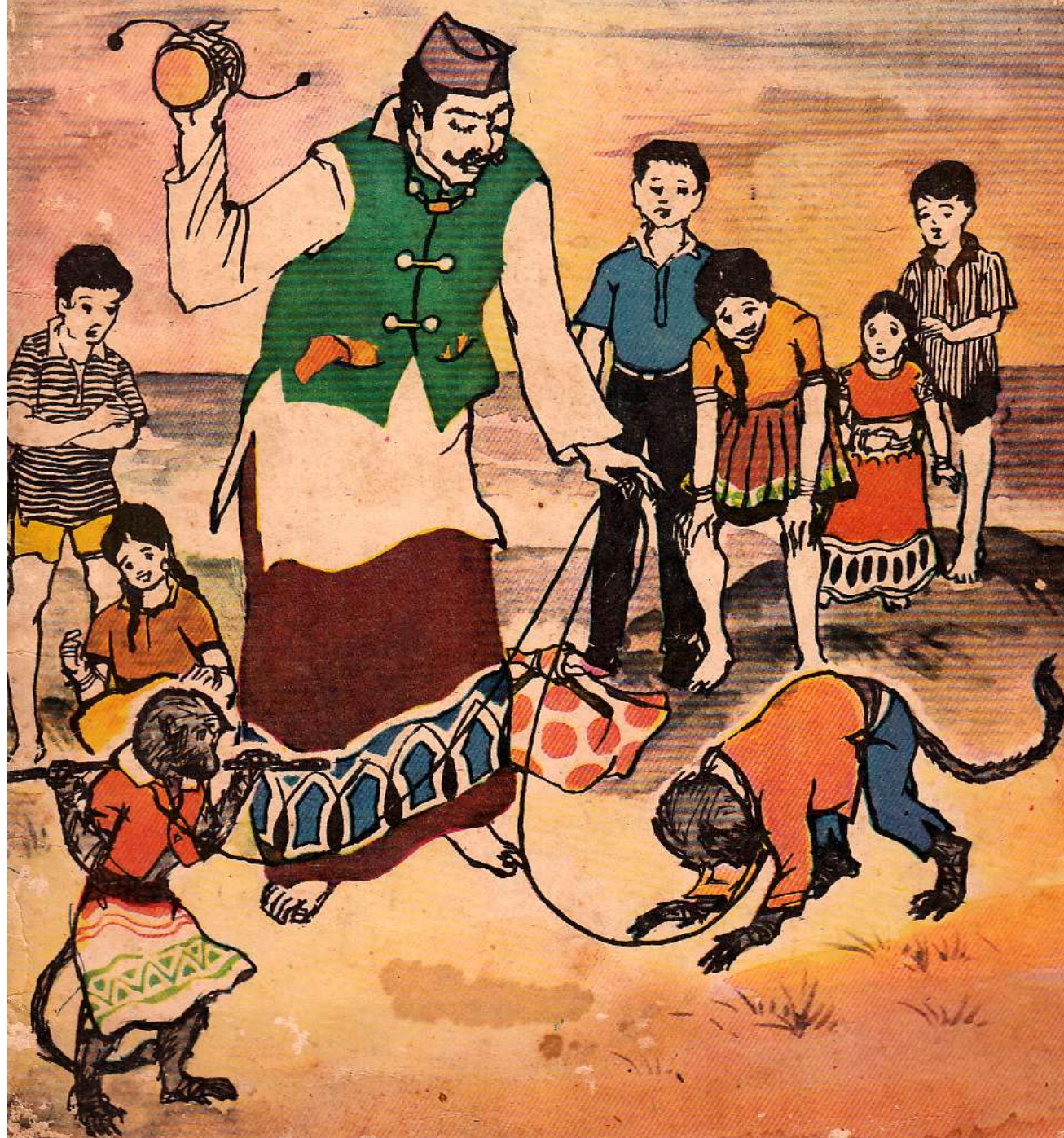


LOST ON THE BEACH



Rs. 1.50

CHILDREN'S BOOK TRUST NEW DELHI

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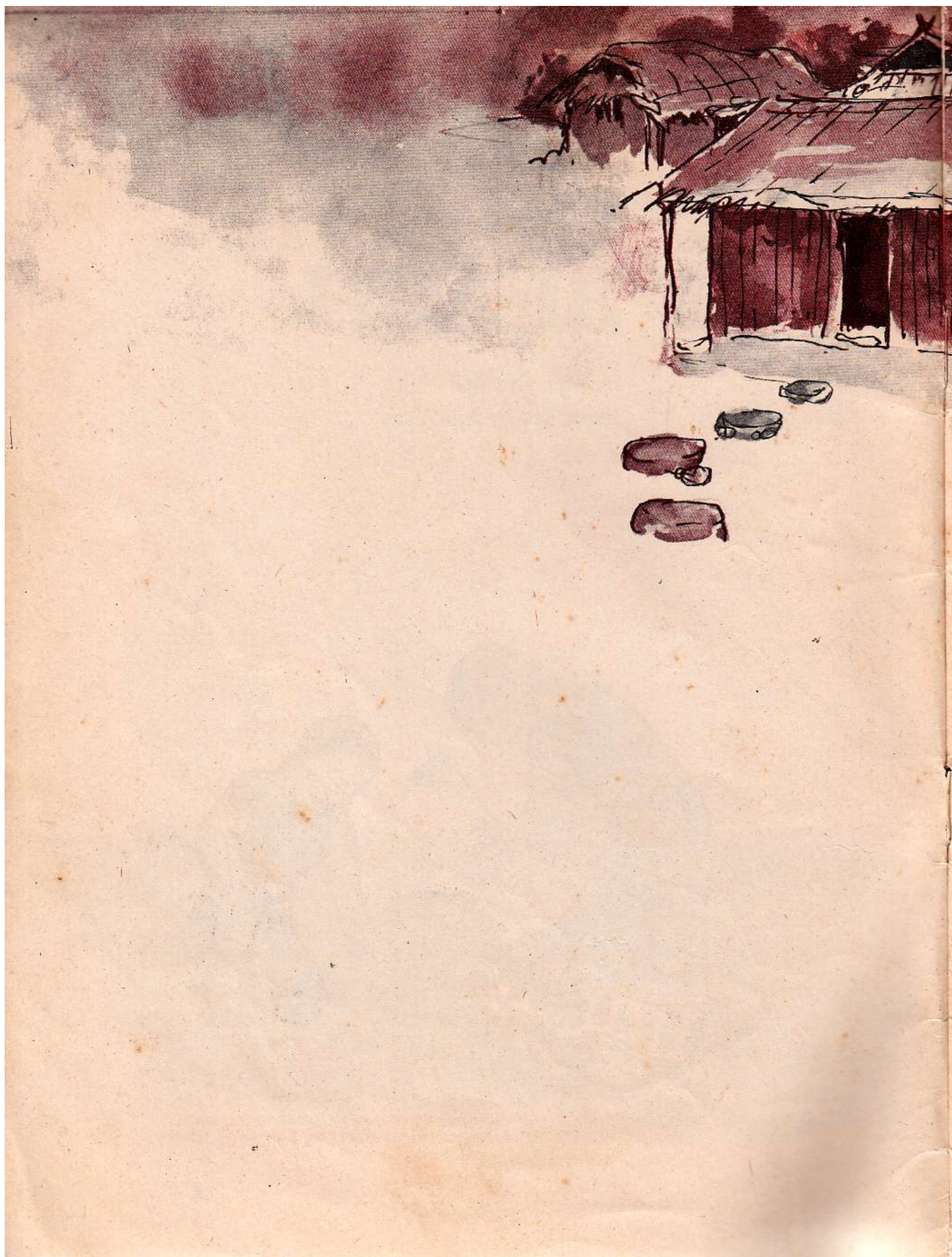
Published by the Children's Book Trust, Nehru House, 4, Bahadur Shah Zafar Marg, New Delhi,
and printed at the Trust's press, the Indraprastha Press, New Delhi

LOST ON THE BEACH

By Mrs. Eva Bell

Illustrated by Anil Vyas







Viranna was a bus conductor. He lived in Bombay in a tiny hut. He had two baby daughters, Uma and Rema. They were twins. Their mother had died when they were born.

Viranna was very sad when he lost his wife. He took no interest in anything, not even the twins. Very soon, however, the two little babies won his heart. He could not help loving them.

The two little girls were dark-skinned like their mother. They had black glossy hair. At times they opened their eyes and blinked. At other times they just smiled. Most of the

time they slept peacefully together. When they were hungry, however, they woke up. Then they screamed and kicked their legs about.

Viranna felt very worried.



“Soon I shall have to go back to work,” he thought. “Who will look after my babies while I am away? They will get ill if they cry so much.”

Next to Viranna’s hut lived an old woman called Muthamma.

Muthamma had a son, but she felt very lonely because he went out to work everyday. She was very interested in

Viranna's two little babies, and she often went to see them.

"Don't worry about your children," Muthamma said to Viranna. "I shall look after them for you. I love children. It will make me very happy to look after them."

"Thank you, mother," Viranna replied. "You are a great help to me. What should I do without you?"

So Muthamma looked after the babies and under her loving care they grew into healthy little girls.

Uma and Rema were full of fun and laughter. Everyone loved them. As they were twins they looked exactly alike. It was very difficult to say which was Uma and which was Rema. Whenever the neighbours mistook one for the other the two girls laughed and laughed.

During the day Uma and Rema played happily in Muthamma's hut. She sang to them and told them Telugu folk stories. In the evening they waited eagerly for their father to come home.





One evening, when Uma and Rema were playing, Uma suddenly stood up.

"Appa will be coming home early today," she said.

"We must get ready now. Quickly, quickly, Granny, we must wash, and we must change our clothes!"

"Then he will say we are as pretty as queens," said Rema.

"Who says all queens are pretty?" asked Muthamma.

"In your stories queens are always pretty, Granny," Rema replied. "I want to look like a queen when Appa comes home."

So Muthamma washed the girls and dressed them in their long, colourful skirts and short blouses. She combed their hair and made them two long pigtailed each. Then

away they skipped to the front of the hut, their anklets jingling, their pigtails flying.

"I can see him! He is coming down the road," shouted Rema.

"Appa is coming! Appa is coming!" shouted Uma.

Viranna could hear their excited voices. He waved to them from the road. He was hot and tired. His Khaki uniform was dirty and wet with sweat.

A line of big stones led from the road to Viranna's hut.

He stepped carefully on the stones, and then at last he was home. His face lit up with a big smile, showing an even row of teeth.

Uma and Rema ran to him. They tugged so hard at his trousers that he could hardly walk.

"Now, now," he said, "don't pull me, I shall fall."





He picked up both the girls and carried them into the hut. They tugged at his pockets.

"What have you brought for us?" they asked.

"Nothing," he answered. "Nothing at all."

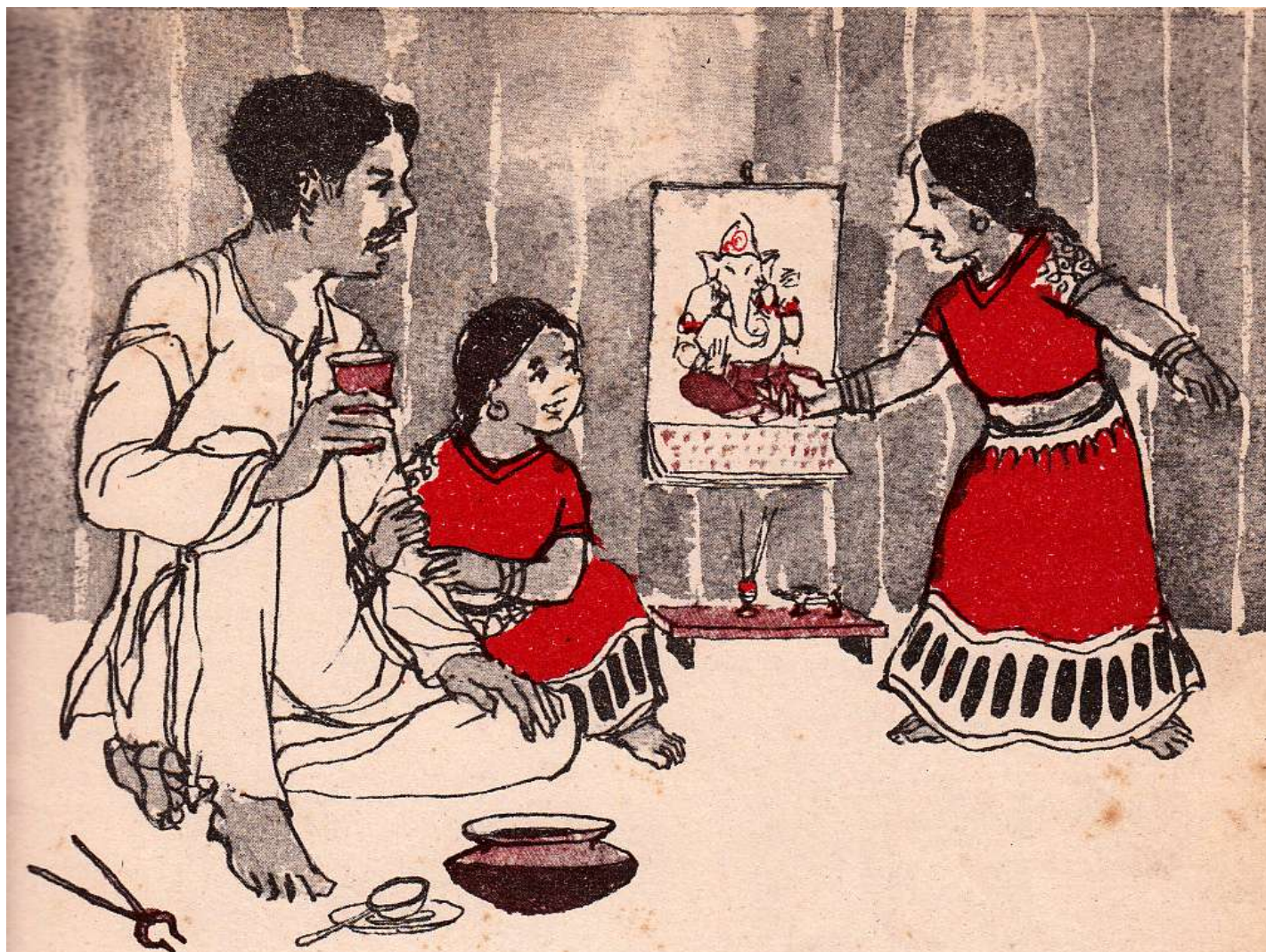
"No, no, you must have brought something," Uma insisted. "Where is it? Is it in this pocket?"

To tease them Viranna went on pretending that he had brought nothing for them. Then at last he took out some chikki that he had bought on the way home.

Happily the girls crunched the sticky sweet and Viranna put some water on the stove for his tea.

"Tomorrow I won't have to go to work," Viranna said "I can stay at home with you all day."

"Tomorrow is Sunday, isn't it Appa?" Uma asked.



"Yes, dear."

"Then let's go to the seaside," Uma pleaded.

"Oh, yes, let's go to the seaside," Rema agreed. "We haven't been there for ever so long."

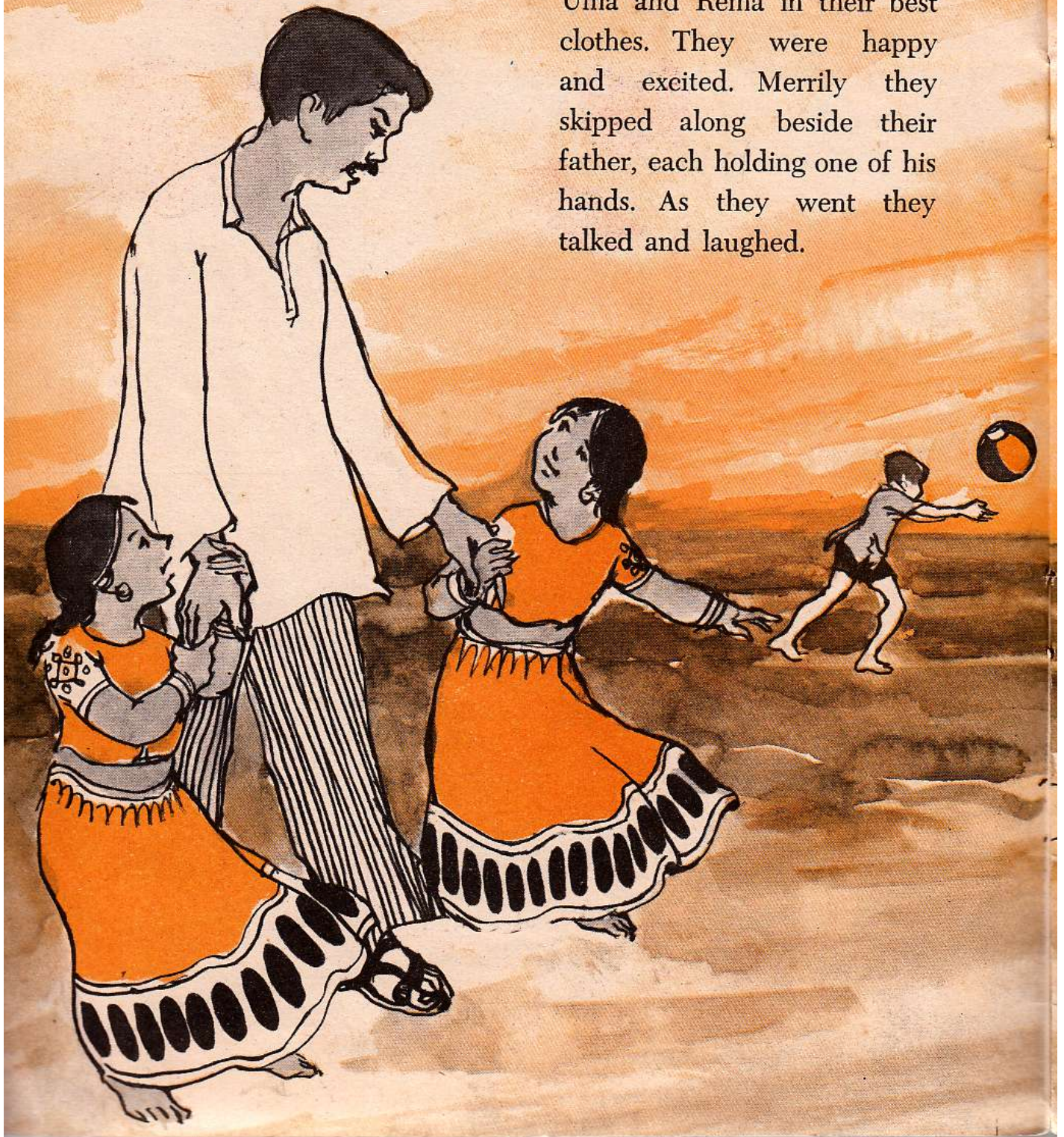
"To the seaside on a Sunday?" Viranna said. "There will be a big crowd of people there. Everyone goes there on a Sunday."

"But it will be such fun, Appa. Do let's go," the two girls pleaded.

"All right, all right, you win," said their father laughing. "We shall go. Now let me have my tea."

The next evening Viranna and the two girls set out for the beach.

Muthamma had dressed Uma and Rema in their best clothes. They were happy and excited. Merrily they skipped along beside their father, each holding one of his hands. As they went they talked and laughed.



When they reached the beach they found that the sea was a long way out. It was low tide. Between the dry beach and the sea was a wide stretch of sand left wet by the sea.

Many children were playing there. With little spades and buckets they dug up the wet sand and piled it up to make houses and castles.

Uma and Rema stood and watched the children playing.

"Come on," said Viranna. "There are many more things to see."

The three walked on along the beach. Soon they came





to the place where the food stalls were. Delicious smells came to them from the hot fried snacks on sale.

"Come and taste. Come and taste," shouted one of the sellers.

Uma and Rema stood and gazed at him. He was wearing a white shirt and dhoti and a bright yellow turban. He shouted again.

"Come little ones! Come and taste. Come and taste."

"I am hungry," Uma declared.

"So am I," said Rema. "I'm thirsty too."

Viranna laughed.

"Oh, so this is why you wanted to come to the beach!" he said. "All right, come over here."

Viranna led the girls to another stall. The seller was wearing a large red turban. He was a friendly man. He had a large grey moustache that drooped over his lips and moved up and down when he spoke.

"Choose what you want," he said kindly.

He lifted a corner of the yellow cellophane which had been spread over the trays of snacks to keep the flies off.

Uma and Rema looked eagerly from one tray to another.

"I want something sweet," said Uma.

"These won't do," said Rema.

The man put the cellophane back again, and the girls walked on. They followed their father through the crowd until they came to a man who was turning a noisy machine. Children flocked round him like bees round a honey-pot.

Uma and Rema liked the whirring sound made by the machine. They stood and watched. The man put some pink candy in a large metal pan. Then he turned a handle and the pan was whirled round and round over a flame.

Soon the candy was turned into fine fluffy threads.

"It's candy-floss," Viranna said.

"Oh, how lovely it is!" Uma exclaimed.

"That's what we want," said Rema.

Viranna bought them each a big ball of candy-floss.

The beach was becoming more and more crowded. Viranna had to push people aside so that Uma and Rema could walk without being trampled on.

"Come, girls," he said, "you must be thirsty. Come and have a cold drink. After that we'll go where the sea-shells are. It's not so crowded there."

They walked across to the man selling sherbet. The girls stared with delight at the row of coloured bottles.

"I want red," said Uma.

"I'll have green," said Rema.

"Then I'll have yellow," said Viranna.

They sipped the cool sherbet happily.

Viranna looked towards the sea. The sun looked like a huge golden-red ball, and the sky seemed to have been painted in rich pink and golden hues.

"Uma, Rema, look at the sun," said Viranna. "You don't often see the sunset. Watch, now. It is going down. Soon it will disappear into the sea."

"Does the sun live in the sea, Appa?" asked Rema.

"Perhaps it does, Rema," he answered with a smile, "Perhaps the sun lives in a palace under the sea!"

"Perhaps," agreed Viranna, his eyes twinkling.

He looked at the sea. It was cool and seemed to invite him to bathe.

"Listen," he said. "Will you two play together on the sand and collect sea-shells? I want to go and bathe. I won't be long."

"Yes, Appa, we will play," they answered.

Viranna led them to a place on the wet sand away from the crowd.

"Play here," he said, "and do not move from this spot. I shall be back soon."



The twins settled down to play in the soft wet sand. They piled it up and patted it into different shapes.

Scattered in the sand they found many different kinds of little shells. They began to collect them. Some were fan-shaped and some were like snail-shells. The shells were of different colours. Some were orange, brown, and grey, and some were speckled with black and white.

"I shall take them home and ask Granny to thread them into a chain for me," said Uma.

"Look at this one, Uma," cried Rema. "Isn't it beautiful?" She held up a long thin cone that shone like a pearl.

"It's lovely," agreed Uma.



Tiny crabs ran across the sand, and the girls watched them. Then they saw a shell-fish crawling along. Uma prodded it with a stick. At once the fish hid inside its shell.

"You've frightened it," scolded Rema.

At that moment the girls heard a strange thumping sound. It grew louder and louder. Looking round, they saw a huge camel galloping towards them.



The camel was angry, for he bared his teeth and neighed loudly. On his back sat a small boy. He clung to the seat and screamed with terror.

Behind the camel ran his driver.

"Stop!" the camel-driver shouted. "Stop! Stop!"

The camel ran faster than ever. The people on the beach cattered in all directions.

Uma and Rema were frightened. The camel seemed to be running straight at them. Soon he would trample on them.

Rema ran towards the sea, and Uma ran towards the beach.





Uma ran into the thick crowd. Her heart was beating wildly. She looked back once or twice to see if the camel was chasing her. She felt safe among the people. When she was sure the camel had gone she wanted to go back.

“Appa and Rema will be looking for me,” she thought.

She stood still and looked around her. She did not know which way to go. A young man and a pretty lady were passing near her. Uma liked the lady’s face and the lovely silver anklets she wore.

“Perhaps this lady is going where Appa is bathing,” thought Uma. “I shall go with her.” Uma followed the young couple. Soon, however, they stopped. They were looking at something. Uma went closer to see what it was.

A young man was making pictures in the wet sand.

One of the pictures showed a man asleep. Beside him sat a lady, combing her long hair. The two figures looked very real.

"The lady's eyelids seem to move," thought Uma. "I think she is going to speak."

The artist who had drawn the picture in the sand spread a cloth below the picture, and people threw coins down on it.

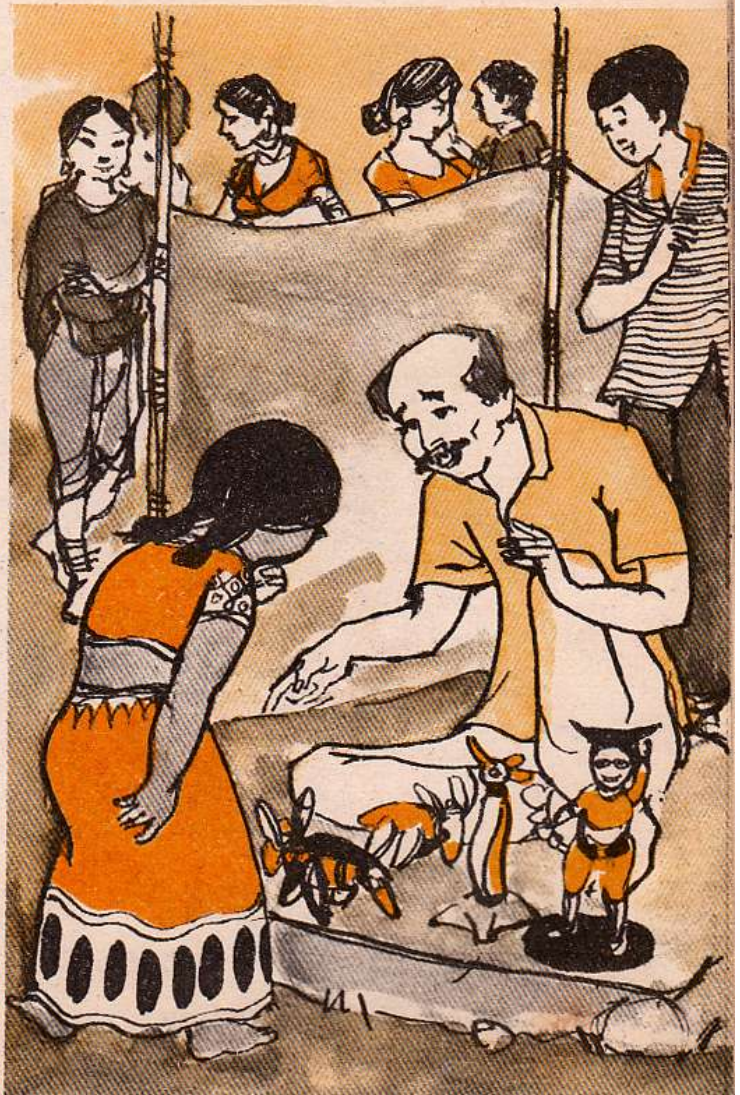
Uma looked round for the pretty lady she had been following, but the couple had already gone.

Uma walked on. She came to a stall selling toys made of shells. She gazed with joy at the toy birds and rabbits; the ladies with water-pots on their hips; and the kings riding in chariots.

"How lovely!" Uma exclaimed.

"Do you want one?" the man behind the stall asked.

"I have no money," Uma answered. "Appa will buy one for me."



At the thought of her father, tears came into her eyes.

"Appa!" she cried. "I must find him."

Uma walked on and on. It was getting dark. The crowd was less now.

"Where is Appa?" Uma murmured. "What shall I do if I can't find him?"

She stood still. Her eyes filled with tears. She did not know which way to go.

Ahead of her the beach went on and on endlessly. She looked towards the water but now there were no people there.

Uma stood and wondered what to do. Where could Appa and Rema be?



Near her someone began beating a drum. A man was calling out in a loud voice. A crowd of children quickly gathered round him.

"What is it?" Uma wondered, and went forward to see. Peeping through the crowd of children, Uma saw that the man had two monkeys. Perhaps the monkeys were going to do tricks.

Uma looked at the monkey-man. She felt afraid of him. He was a dark, stout man, with a black cap perched on his head. Round his neck he had a black cord on which was a single golden bead. He had a long black moustache with ends that curled up. He wore a dusty white coat and over it a blue waistcoat. The waistcoat had two pockets. They were filled with all sorts of things, and bulged out.

Now and again the monkey-man said something to the





children nearest him. This made them laugh and the monkey-man laughed too.

“He seems a nice man after all,” Uma thought.

Now the monkey-man called to the monkeys.

The male monkey came forward and bowed.

“This is my chief actor,” the monkey-man said. “His name is Babu.”

The monkey bowed again very low, showing his red apple-like cushions. The monkey-man put forward a tiny stool for Babu to sit on.

Leela, the female monkey, now came and sat on the monkey-man's shoulder.

"Now, Babu," said the monkey-man, "show the boys and girls how you go for your evening walk."

Babu stood up. He took a long stick and held it with both hands behind his shoulders and walked round in a circle.

Babu then sat down on his stool again. The monkey-man offered him a red velvet cap. Babu put it on. The monkey-man then handed him a blue waistcoat. Babu had some difficulty in putting it on, so the man helped him.

Babu now looked very funny, and the children laughed heartily.

Babu pretended to be angry, however, and bared his teeth.

"Now, now, Babu," warned the monkey-man, "watch your manners."

Babu stood up and turned a number of somersaults. When he was tired he went and sat on his stool again.

Now Leela came down shyly from the man's shoulder. She wore a red skirt which swayed as she walked.

Leela went over to Babu and sat beside him. Babu snarled at her and walked away. Leela ran behind him, and Babu growled angrily at her.

"Don't be ill-mannered, Babu," said the man. "Leela only wants to talk to you."

Babu would not listen, however. He held out his hand, asking for his gun. He held the gun on his shoulder, like a soldier.



“Ah,” said the monkey-man, “Babu does not want to be troubled by Leela, so he is going off to the war.”

But Babu could not stand the hard life of a soldier. He put his gun to his head, and fell down dead.

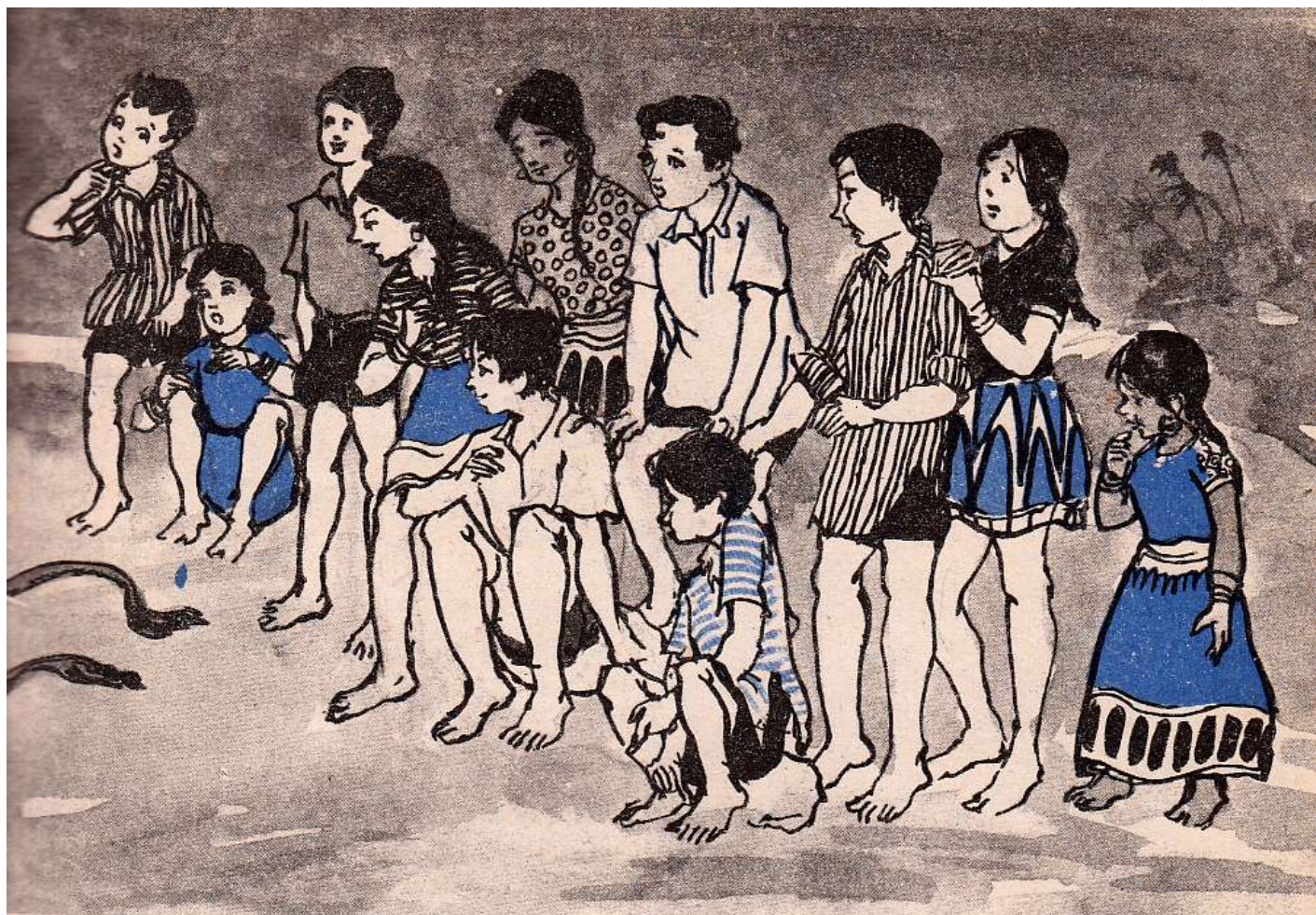
Leela covered her eyes with her hands and pretended to weep. The children who were watching also dabbed at their eyes.

“The show is over,” said the monkey-man.

The children still stood there looking sadly down at the monkey. Babu could not remain still for long. He got up and began to walk away.

“He is not dead!” shouted the children.

“Oh, you naughty monkey! Why can’t you lie down



and keep still ? ” yelled the monkey-man to Babu.

The children gathered round the monkeys and fed them with peanuts. The monkeys were hungry, and the peanuts were soon finished.

In twos and threes the children went away, and the monkey man also rose to go. He collected his things together.

Uma was still standing beside him, for she did not know where to go. Now she remembered that she was lost. She began to cry.

“Why are you crying, little girl ? ” asked the monkey-man in a kind voice.

“I have lost Appa and Rema,” Uma replied. “I don’t



know where they are. Could you take me home please ? ”

The monkey-man looked at Uma. She reminded him of his youngest daughter at home in Sholapur, his native village.

“ You are lost, are you ? ” he said softly. “ Now how did you get lost ? ”

Uma told the monkey-man how Appa went to bathe in the sea, and how she and Rema were playing on the sand when the camel came and they had to run away.

“ I see, I see,” said the monkey-man. “ Well, Appa must be looking for you. Perhaps Appa has told the policeman you are lost. Come, let us go to the policeman. He will find Appa.”

But Uma was very frightened of policemen.

“ Oh, no,” she begged, “ please don’t take me to the policeman. I want to go home.”

She began to cry loudly.

"All right, all right, don't cry," said the monkey-man in a soothing voice. "I won't take you to the policeman. Stay with me then, till we find your father." It was now getting late and the monkey-man was tired. He had been taking his monkeys about since morning. He wanted to rest, but now Uma was with him. He did not know how to find her father.

The monkey-man noticed just then that there was no one on the merry-go-round. The owner was standing there waiting for customers.

"Would you like to go on the merry-go-round?" he asked Uma. She nodded.

He picked her up and put her astride a horse. Soon the horse began to go round and round. Faster and faster they went, until Uma could not see things properly. Everything was blurred. It was thrilling to go so fast. In her excitement



she let go of the horse. Suddenly, she slipped and fell off.

The monkey-man ran towards her. Uma was crying. There was a cut across her forehead, and blood was trickling down.

“Oh, what shall I do?” thought the man.

He was afraid her father would blame him for the accident. Then he remembered the lump of sugar he carried in his pocket for his monkeys. He took it out, crushed it, and put it on Uma’s wound. The bleeding soon stopped.

The monkey-man looked around for a quiet spot. In one corner of the beach there was a statue of Mahatma Gandhi standing on a broad pedestal.

The monkey-man looked around for a quiet spot. In one down on the steps. He tied the monkeys close to her.

“Stay here, little girl,” he said. “I will bring you something to eat.”

He went to one of the stalls and bought some puris and cooked vegetables. He gave some to Uma and ate the rest himself. The monkeys had eaten so many peanuts they didn’t want anything else!

Then the monkey-man lay down and went to sleep. Soon he was snoring loudly.

Uma too went off to sleep. The monkeys curled up close by and closed their eyes.

It was dark and no one could see the little group.

Viranna was very worried when Rema ran towards the water crying. He quickly dried himself and put on his

clothes. Then carrying Rema, he ran towards the beach.

He searched everywhere, and asked everyone if they had seen a little girl crying, a little girl exactly like Rema.

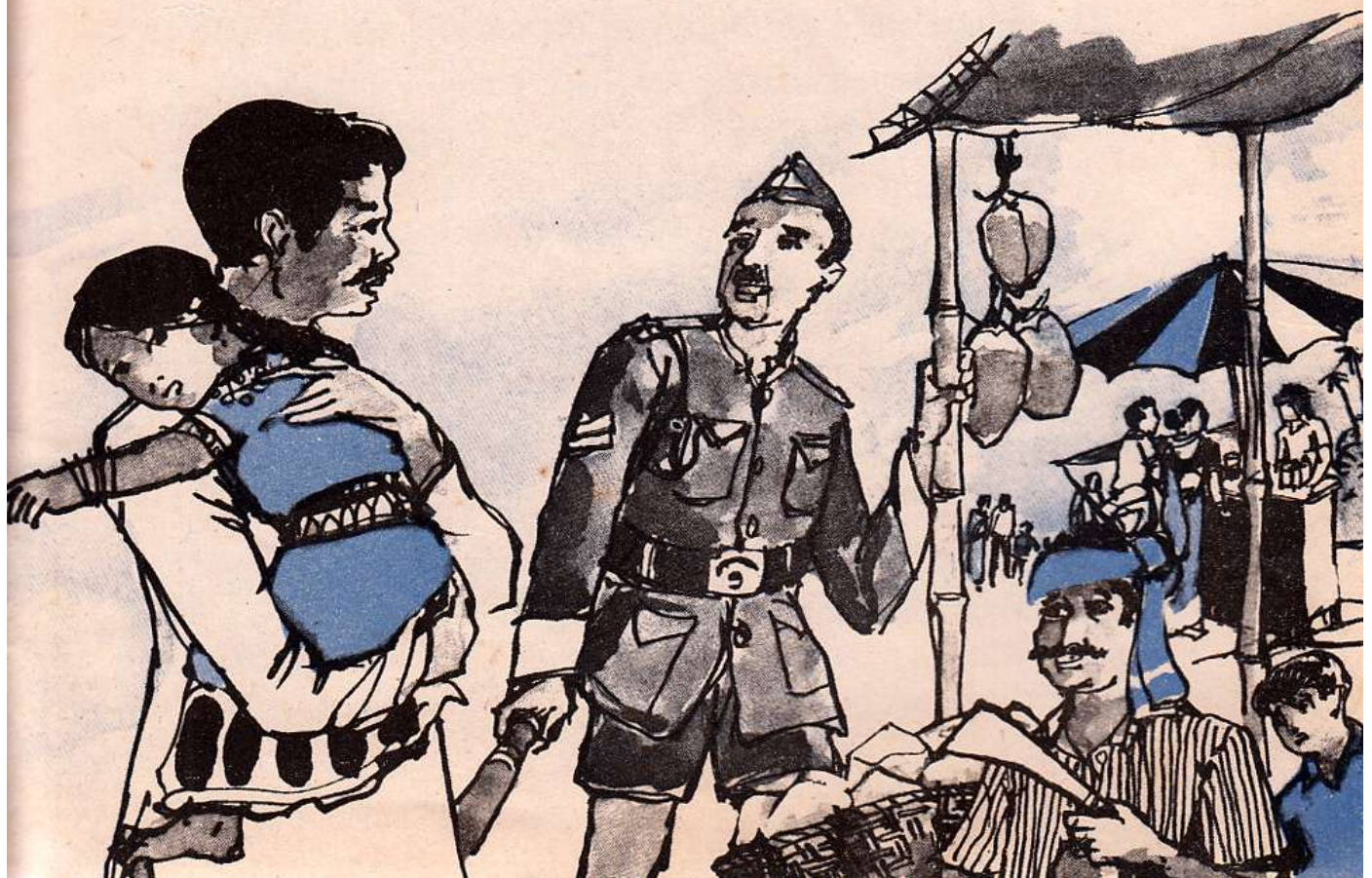
But no one had seen her.

He turned and walked back in the opposite direction, stopping at each stall to ask if anyone had seen her. But the reply was always the same :

“The beach is so crowded. There are so many children. How can we remember her ?”

Viranna was very sad. He did not know how to find Uma. He saw a policeman standing near the stalls and went to him.

“My daughter is lost. She looks exactly like this one. If anyone finds her, please let me know,” Viranna said. The policeman promised to do what he could.





Viranna sat down on a stone and waited. He was now quite close to the sleeping group, but it was dark so he could not see them.

Viranna waited on the beach till ten o'clock. The beach was now deserted. Everyone had gone home. Even the shopkeepers were pulling down the shutters.

"I am going off duty," said the policeman. "There is no sign of your daughter. You must go to the police station and file a complaint there."

Viranna walked back in the dark, carrying the sleeping Rema. His heart was heavy.

"Why did I leave them alone?" he thought. "Oh, why did I go to bathe? I wonder who has carried her away?"

He registered a complaint at the police station. The policeman there promised to bring her home if she was found.

Viranna went home and put Rema to bed. He could not sleep, so he sat outside the hut.

Muthamma came out and joined him. Tears trickled down her cheeks when she thought of Uma. All through the dark night they sat there, waiting for the policeman to bring Uma home. But no one came.

By five o'clock in the morning, Viranna could sit still no longer.

"I shall walk down to the beach and search once more," he told Muthamma.

"Go, my son," she said. "I will wait here."

Viranna walked along the deserted beach. Dawn was just breaking, and the air was filled with the chirping of birds. There was no one about. A stray dog or two looked lazily up at Viranna as he passed.

As he walked past the statue of Mahatma Gandhi, he saw a monkey pulling at its leash. Viranna walked towards the monkey.

And then he saw Uma!

She was fast asleep on one of the steps. Babu lay beside her and her arm was round him. Next to Uma lay the monkey-man. He was snoring peacefully.

Viranna tapped the man.

The monkey-man woke up.

"Who are you?" he asked. "What do you want?"

"I want my daughter," Viranna answered.

The man jumped up. He was angry with Viranna.

"Are you her father? Then why did you leave the poor

child alone on the crowded beach ? ” He asked angrily.

“ I am very sorry I left her,” Viranna said. “ I have suffered enough for it all night. I want to thank you for being kind enough to keep her with you.”

Viranna held out his hand and grasped the hand of the monkey-man.

The monkey-man told him how he had found Uma.

“ I am really very grateful to you,” said Viranna.

He pulled out a five-rupee note from his pocket and held it out to the monkey-man.

“ No, no,” said the man at once. “ I will not take it. Children are God’s little creatures. By serving them we serve Him.”

“ May God bless you and your monkeys,” said Viranna.

Just then, Babu stirred and started chattering into Uma’s ear.

Uma awoke and saw Viranna.

“ Appa ! ” she cried, and ran into his arms. “ Oh, Appa, I couldn’t find you. I was so frightened ! ”

Viranna hugged her. “ Everything is all right now, little one. We are together again. Come let us go home. Muthamma and Rema are waiting for you.”

Uma said goodbye to the monkey-man and his monkeys.

Then she held her father’s hand and they walked back home.

